THE 'CONVENTIONS OF THE ARABS' (MAʿHŪD AL-ʿARAB) AS A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF TAFSIR [(*)]

Abdulrahman Helli[1]

ABSTRACT

This article aims to re-examine a rather neglected yet fundamental principle in the Islamic exegetical heritage, namely, 'considering the conventions of the Arabs at the time of revelation of the Qurʾān' - murāʿāt maʿhūd al-ʿArab fī ʿaṣr an-nuzūl. The study adopts the historical approach, inductive and analytical method. It begins with a theoretical and historical introduction of the meaning and implications of this principle by demonstrating -through examples from the tradition-how it was employed for the interpretation and comprehension of the Qurʾān. The article then offers an examination of the significance of this principle in light of the writings of al-imām al-Shāṭibī, who christened the appellation maʿhūd al-ʿArab and then proceeds to presenting the approach of the Indian exegete ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī on the relevance of the common parlance of the ancient Arabs, with a comparative analysis of their respective approach. The study concludes that the exegetes took care of the conventions of the Arabs, but that was not always the case, the significance of the research can be seen through the prospects of implementing this principle in the field of Qurʾanic Studies for the development of a historical-critical hermeneutical approach for textual analysis.

Keywords: *Arabic Linguistic Conventions, Literary Conventions, Revelation of The Qurʾān, Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab, Al-Shāṭibī, Al-Farāhī, Late Antiquity, Al-Ummiyyūn.*

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[1]   Associate Professor of Tafsir and Quranic Sciences, Department of The Qur'an and Sunnah, College of Sharia and Islamic Studies - Qatar University
Email: a.helli@qu.edu.qa

1. INTRODUCTION

Many scholars of Qurʾanic Studies have been occupied, in various ways and depending on their epistemological precepts, with the 'problem of the science of exegesis' *ishkāl ʿilm at-tafsīr*, which was raised by Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī (d. 716 AH) in his search for a "foundational –epistemic- paradigm for the science of exegesis" *qānūnun yuʿwwalu ʿalayhi wa-yuṣāru fī hāḏā l-fanni ilayhi*.[2] al-Ṭūfī tried to provide a unifying paradigm by establishing fundamental rules for the science of exegesis, yet his attempt did not quite solve the problem, not entirely. This is evident in the persistence of the various theories of exegesis and the multiplicity of approaches for the interpretation of the Qurʾān; a fact abundantly evident and expressed in the various titles and numerous volumes that were later classified under the scholarly discipline of 'Principles of Exegesis' *uṣūl at-tafsīr* – a discipline that has been nominally announced, but is yet to be epistemically established.[3] The discipline of 'Qurʾanic Sciences' *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* remains the overarching discipline that gathers the various sub-disciplines that contribute to the interpretation of the Qurʾān and that examine the various dimensions that ought to be considered in the study of the Qurʾān. This last discipline, however, falls short of providing a conclusive foundational epistemic matrix for Qurʾanic exegesis, which remains a desideratum for scholarly work and a necessity for public religious discourse.

Finding a common epistemic paradigm, which would take the form of a standardization of the principles of interpretation has been a recurring concern of Qurʾān-scholars and has regularly been raised among scholars. This has been motivated by a number of considerations. The first consideration is the fact that all approaches to reform and renewal in the Muslim World take interpretation (*taʾwīl*) to be their primary legitimate gateway to address prevailing religious questions and societal concerns. Had the inherited conventional hermeneutical mechanisms been sufficient to automatically fulfil this reformative and rejuvenating purpose, the need for reinterpretation would not have risen. As such, the standardization of the hermeneutical theory became the main demand of religious reformers. The second consideration that may justify a theoretical revision of Qurʾanic exegetical disciplines is the fact that the exegetical practices of the Muslim community varied greatly during the community's long history.

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[2]   Al-Ṭūfī, N. (1989). *Al-Iksīr Fī ʿilm At-Tafsīr*, Ed. ʿAbd Al-Qādir Ḥussein. Beirut: Dār Al-Awzāʿī, p. 36.

[3]   Helli, A. (2014). Qawāʿid Al-Tafsīr: Al-Nashʾah Wa al-Taṭwīr Wa al-Ṣilah Bi al-ʿulūm Al-Ukhrā. *Majallat Al-Tafāhum, 45*, p. 85–108.

Despite the long history of the discipline of exegesis it never committed to a unified methodology, a fact reflected by the plurality and diversity of methods of exegesis in the evolution of Islamic cultural experiences. Notwithstanding some commonalities among the hermeneutical schools, they differed on many more aspects and most importantly in the way they applied their shared principles. This, in turn, necessitated the emergence of critical assessments of the standards of interpretation as well as their method of application, which led to a certain epistemic instability in the science of exegesis, constantly requiring theoretical and practical reformation in response to evolving questions.[4]

Various concepts have been used by theorists of Qurʾanic hermeneutics and exegetes to emphasize the importance as well as the complementarity between the historical and the linguistic dimensions in textual interpretation. Of these, two stand out: the first is *siyāq* (context), which emerged in the writings of al-imām al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204 AH) and the second is *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* (convention of the Arabs) that emerged in the writings of al-imām al-Shāṭibī (d. 790 AH). Despite the fact that these two concepts have been established in the various departments of Qurʾanic Studies, I argue that they are still largely under-appreciated when it comes to practical implementation. A reexamination of these terms and the revitalization of their dimensions would produce a significant added value towards the establishment of a hermeneutic theory that builds upon the rich Islamic exegetical tradition. Moreover, revisiting this neglected element in the Islamic intellectual heritage would compliment modern scientific efforts to situate the Qurʾān in its historical context. The present essay's contribution to that debate is an indigenous concept (*maʿhūd al-ʿArab*) that is at once broader and yet more precise than the commonly known concept of siyāq (context). It is broader because, by encompassing elements like *linguistic* conventions, *cultural* norms and *societal* habits it covers much more than 'historical' context, that are often defined in theological-cum-political terms. *Maʿhūd al-ʿArab,* in the sense here proposed is a place-holder of anthropological materials and above all a legitimizing concept from within the Islamic tradition, for the use historical-critical method in Qurʾanic exegesis.

Research objectives: This paper aims, firstly, to examine the principle of [observing] the 'conventions of the Arabs' at the time of revelation primarily through presenting a historical overview of its theoretical underpinnings as well

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[4]   Cf. Özsoy, Ö. (2014). Das Unbehagen Der Koranexegese: Den Koran In Anderen Zeiten Zum Sprechen Bringen. *Frankfurter Zeitschrift Für Islamisch-Theologische Studien 1,* Pp. 29-69.

as its application to certain practical cases before the time of al-imām al-Shāṭibī. Secondly, the exegetical implications of the principle shall be examined in light of these examples and the works of al-Shāṭibī in general. Thirdly, the position of ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Farāhī on the significance of the language use of the ancient Arabs shall be laid down and contrasted to that of al-Shāṭibī. Finally, we will explore the prospects of implementing this rather neglected principle of Qurʾanic exegesis in the field of Qurʾanic Studies.

Research problem: The article discusses a central problem in the interpretation of the Qurʾan, which is how to understand the Qurʾan as a discourse and determine its significance. Recently, contemporary readings of the Qurʾan have emerged, which interpret the Qurʾan based on linguistic significance claiming that the Qurʾan is valid for every time and place, ignoring the contextual meaning of the era of revelation and understanding the direct addressees in the era of revelation, which it is a prerequisite for understanding the Qurʾan. Although early exegetes were attentive to this principle in their interpretations, theorizing about it shall wait until the time of al-Shāṭibī. al-Shāṭibī's theory came as a response to those who understood the Qurʾan with meanings that did not exist in the era of revelation, and this research attempts to clarify this origin, its historical applications, and its current implications.

Research approach: The article adopts historical and inductive method by tracing the commentators' interest in this principle and its development throughout the history of *tafsir*, passing through al-Shāṭibī and ending with al-Farāhī. The article also adopts the analytical method in highlighting the interpretation of this principle by the al-mufasiroun.

Extant literature: In the last two decades, some studies addressed the principle of "the Arabs' familiarity", from different perspectives. Some studies were either interested in its meaning by al-Shāṭibī and its application[5] or looked at it from

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5   Imām, M K. (2007) Al-Maʿnā Wa al-Siyāq Bayn Al-Shāfiʿī Wa al-Shāṭibī: Ruʾyah Maqāṣidiyyah, *Majallat Al-Iḥiyā, Al-Rābiṭah Al-Muḥammadiyyah, Morocco 26*, p. 82–87.
     Boussif, M. (2021). *The Maʾhad Al-Arab In Al-Shatibi's Discourse And Its Impact On Scientific Interpretation.* (Issue 7). University of Abu Bakr Belkaid - Tlemcen, Aliastieab, p. 414-433
     Ramaḍān, Y. (2007). Al-Qirāʾah Al-Siyāqiyyah ʿind Al-Uṣūlyyīn: Qirāʾāh Fī Mafhūm Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab ʿind Al-Shāṭibī, *Majallat Al-Iḥiyāʾ, Al-Rābiṭah Al-Muḥammadiyyah, Morocco 25,* p. 113–24.

the perspective of the legal theory[6]. Some studies adopted a linguistics perspective[7] while others focused on the practice of some exegetes[8] and their interpretations[9].

This study uncovers the theoretical groundings of the principle of "observing the custom of the Arabs" and its position in the qurʾānic hermeneutic. The article addresses also al-Farāhī's understudied theory of interpretation.

2. THE CONSIDERATION OF THE CONVENTIONS OF THE ARABS BEFORE AL-IMĀM AL-SHĀṬIBĪ

The 'conventions of the Arabs' and the local connotations of Qurʾanic terminology, have received special attention from early on in the history of Qurʾanic interpretation. Among the earliest examples are the narrations attributed to the companion Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68 AH) collected in the work entitled *Masāʾil Nāfiʿ ibn al-Azraq* (d. 65 AH), where Ibn ʿAbbās invokes verses from ancient Arabic poetry in an attempt to elucidate obscure Qurʾanic terms and grammatical constructions that Nāfiʿ ibn al-Azraq enquired about.[10] This work signifies the importance of tracing the language of the Qurʾān back to the linguistic practices of the Arabs during the time of revelation. It has been narrated that Mujāhid (d. 104 AH), a disciple of Ibn ʿAbbās, said: "It is not permissible

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6   Al-Khaṭīb, M. (2014). Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab Fī Al-Khiṭāb Wa-Ishkāliyyat Qirāʾat Al-Naṣṣ Al-Sharʿī, *Majallat Al-Tartīl, Al-Rābiṭah Al-Muḥammadiyyah Li Al-ʿUlamāʾ* (2), p. 51–78.
    ʿAbdussalām, A. (2002). Maʿḥūd Al-ʿArab Fī Talaqī Al-Khiṭāb Al-Dīnī, *Majallat Al-Sharīʿah Wa-L-Dirasāt Al-Islāmiyyah, University Of Kuwait 17* (48), p. 63–111.
7   Al-Kanj, U J Q. (2015). The Application of The Standards of Intentionality And Acceptability In Text In Ordinary Discourse of The Arabs, *Journal of Linguistic And Literary Studies (JLLS), 6* (2).
8   Naqqāz, I. (2014). Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab Fī Talaqī Al-Khiṭāb Al-Qurʾānī: Qirāʾah Fī Tafsīr Al-Ẓilāl Li-Sayyid Quṭb, *Majallat Al-Ḥiwār Al-Mutawasiṭī 13–14,* p. 133–48.
9   Al-Sulaiman, K. (2020). The Principle Islamic Legislation Has Been Revealed in The Classical Language of The Arabs And The Effects of This in Promoting Moderation in Understanding Islamic Texts. *Umm Al-Qura University Journal of Sharia Sciences and Islamic Studies* (80), p. 999 – 1048.
    Bogfour, L. (2018). The Impact of The Familiar Condition of The Arabs on The Interpretation of The Verses of The Qur'an: A Critical View. *Journal of Scientific Research and Islamic Studies* (15), p. 477 – 505.
10 Ibn ʿAbbās. (1993). Masāʾil Nāfiʿ Ibn Al-Azraq ʿan Ibn ʿAbbās, Muḥammad Aḥmad Al-Dālī, (Ed.). Cyprus: Al-Jaffān Wa Al-Jābī. For Further Documentation And Elaboration on These Enquiries See: Al-Ḥayyāṭī, Aḥmad (1997). Shawāhīd Al-Tafsīr ʿind Ibn ʿAbbās, *Majallat Dār Al-Ḥadīth Al-Ḥasaniyyah 150*, p. 121–89.

for a person who believes in God and the hereafter, to speak about the Book of God if they do not have knowledge of the dialects of the Arabs."[11] Furthermore, the citation of pre-Islamic poetry and reference to the language of the Arabs was a wide-spread practice among linguists who attempted to interpret the Qurʾān. This is evident in various works that are packed with Arabic poetry such as *Majāz al-Qurʾān* by abū ʿUbaydah (d. 208 AH), *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* by al-Farrāʾ (d. 207 AH) and *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān* by al-Kisāʾī (d. 189 AH). The extensive citations from poetry and the parlance of the Arabs testify to the rigorous attempt to document the meanings that were known to the Arabs at the time of revelation.

Consider the following statement, attributed to al-imām al-Shāfiʿī: "The Qurʾān and the Sunnah were sent down solely in the convention (cf. also 'terminology', Ar. *muṣṭalaḥ*) of the Arabs and their manners of debate/dialogue (*muḥāwara*), address/conversation (*taḥāṭub*), [presenting an] argument (*iḥtijāj*), and demonstration (*istidlāl*) and not in the manners of the Greeks. Every people have their language and their [linguistic] conventions (alt. terminology)."[12] He goes on to add: "the people became ignorant of the [meanings of the Qurʾān] and differed thereupon for no reason other than relinquishing the language of the Arabs (cf. the 'Arab tongue', *lisān al-ʿArab*).[13] al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) goes into great length elaborating the position of al-imām al-Shāfiʿī about the relevance of consulting the parlance of the Arabs in interpreting the Qurʾān. He comments on al-Shāfiʿīs position by saying: "The predecessors (*salaf*) before al-Shāfiʿī have also identified the same source of (unwarranted) innovations as he did: Ignorance of the tongue of the Arabs."[14]

In his work *al-Risālah* al-Shāfiʿī declares that the Qurʾān was sent down exclusively in the language of the Arabs and that "no one can elaborate on any of the sciences of the Book (the Qurʾān) if they are not versed in the amplitude of the 'Arab tongue', its capacity (*siʿah*), the unity of its meanings (*jimāʿah*) and variability [of these meanings] (*tafarruqahā*); whoever possesses this knowledge about the tongue [of the Arabs] is free of the 'dubious character' of those who

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[11]   Al-Zarkashī, B. (1957). *Al-Burhān Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān*. Muḥammad Abū Al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, (Ed.) (Vol. 1). Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ Al-Kutub Al-ʿArabiyyah, p. 396.

[12]   Al-Suyūṭī, J. (N.D). *Ṣawn Al-Manṭiq Wa Al-Kalām ʿan Fannay Al-Manṭiq Wa Al-Kalām, ʿAlī Samī Al-Naṣār And Suʿād ʿAlī ʿAbd Al-Rāziq.* (Ed.)(Vol. 1). Silsilat Iḥyāʾ Al-Turāth Al-Islāmī, Majmaʿ Al-Buḥūth Al-Islāmiyyah, p. 48.

[13]   Ibid., p. 48.

[14]   Ibid., p. 55.

lacks this knowledge."[15] However, as noted by Muḥammad abū Zahrah (d. 1974 AD), it seems that al-Shāfiʿī's approach regarding the Arabicity of the text is not limited to the theoretical or doctrinal potentials of the text, which was the approach of later *uṣūl* scholars (scholars of Islamic legal jurisprudence). His approach is rather the groundwork to draw attention to the fact that the derivation of rulings from the Qurʾān can only be accomplished in light of an in-depth understanding of the [rhetorical] manners (alt. styles, Ar. *asālīb*) of the Arabs. It is for this reason that his studies focused mainly on the Arabs' customs of [eloquent] 'figurative eloquence' (*bayān*) and 'clarification' (*īḍāḥ*). For, as abū Zahrah elaborates, the Qurʾān was sent down in the disposition of these people and their customs and in their linguistic manners of rhetoric and reasoning, the Qurʾān's superiority notwithstanding.[16]

It is for this reason that al-Shāfiʿī's work was predominantly concerned with the study of the 'figurative eloquence' (*bayān*) of the Arabs; his work was effectively a consecration of their [literary] 'styles' (*asālīb*). By so doing he also coined a number of technical terms that became standard in the linguistic sciences and to textual analysis. It is worth noting here that the oldest scientific use of the term 'interpretation' (*taʾwīl*) is to be found in al-Shāfiʿī's *Risālah*, where it refers to an interpretation that is largely a matter of a personal opinion regarding the meaning of the text that is in turn supported by some 'justification'.[17] This 'justification' that al-Shāfiʿī sets as a condition for acceptable interpretation was the primary motive for the theoretical argumentation that we find in his different works in the search for rules through which the text may be understood. It is imperative that these rules are followed; the text may not be approached otherwise. The term *siyāq* (historical context) as coined by al-Shāfiʿī is perhaps the most important of his technical terms, which later became central in the linguistic sciences, fundamentals of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) as well as the rules of reading and understanding texts.[18]

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15   Al-Shāfiʿī, M. (1940). *Al-Risālah*. Aḥmad Shākir, (Ed.). Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-ʿilmiyyah, p. 50

16   Abū Zahrah, M. (N.D.). *Al-Shafiʿī: Ḥayātuh Wa ʿaṣruh Wa ārāʾuh Al-Fiqhiyyah*. Dār Al-Fikr Al-ʿArabī, p. 192.

17   Helli, A. (2011). Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Taʾwīl Fī ʿUlūm Al-Qurʾān: Dirāsah Fī Al-Mafhūm. *Majallat Al-Tajdīd* (30), p. 11-35.

18   Helli, A. (Forthcoming). *Al-Imām Al-Shāfiʿī Wa-Taqʿīd Qirāʾat Al-Nuṣūṣ: Dirāsah Fī Nashʾat Muṣṭalaḥ 'Al-Siyāq' Fī Mudawwanāt Al-Shāfiʿī"*. Bayt Al-Ḥikmah.

In addition to al-Shāfiʿī's attention to the issue of 'context' (*siyāq*) in his works on textual understanding and analysis, he also points to various other aspects that need to be taken into account when understanding the text. Among these aspects are elements pertaining to the 'contextual conditions' (*siyāq al-ḥāl*) and 'circumstance' (*maqām*) such as the 'reasons of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), or 'prophetic narrations', or the life of the Arabs at the time of revelation, or any other factor that may necessitate that we adjust our [literal] understanding of the text. In other words, understanding a text, according to al-Shāfiʿī, is a matter of 'independent reasoning' (*ijtihād*) and the linguistic context is one of its essential tools, but not the only tool; for the historical context also has profound importance. Therefore, both the *linguistic* and the *historical* dimensions ought to be taken into consideration, for they accompanied the 'descent' (*tanzīl*) of the Qurʾān, which was revealed according to the linguistic manners and within the historical environment of the Arabs. A prominent example, which may illustrate al-Shāfiʿī's attention of the historical context of revelation is his interpretation of *ʾulī l-amri* (those from among you who have been entrusted with authority),[19] whom the believers were ordered to obey, and whom he argues are 'the leaders of the Prophet's troops' (*umarāʾ sarāyā rasūl Allāh*). al-Shāfiʿī supports his argument by stating that all of the Arabs around Mecca were unfamiliar with the concept of *imāra* (authority) and disdained submission to each other's authority. When the Arabs submitted to the authority of the Messenger of God, they felt that such a submission is only befitting to the Messenger of God. Hence, according to al-Shāfiʿī's reasoning, this verse commands them to obey the 'authority' that the Messenger has commanded them to obey (*ʾulī al-amr*). Form context, we understand, that this obedience is far from being a matter of absolute submission, was a compromise for an exception.[20] Accordingly, the historical dimension

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[19] يَاأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ، وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ، فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ

إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا" [النساء:59]

"O you who have attained to Faith! Pay heed unto God and pay heed unto the apostle and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority; and if you are at variance over any matter, refer it unto God and the apostle, if you [truly] believe In God and the last day. this is the best [for you], and best in the end." Surat Al-Nisāʾ/4:59.

"Yaaa Aiyuhal Lazeena Aamanooo Atee'ul Laaha Wa Atee'ur Rasoola Wa Ulil Amri Minkum Fa In Tanaaza'tum Fee Shai'in Faruddoohu Ilal Laahi War Rasooli In Kuntum Tu'minoona Billaahi Wal Yawmil Aakhir; Zaalika Khairunw Wa Ahsanu Ta'weelaa" Surat Al-Nisāʾ/4:59.

[20]   Al-Shāfiʿī, *Al-Risālah*, p. 80.

pertaining to the customs of the Arabs, which is an extra-textual determinant, limited the scope of the linguistic meaning in this verse.

The linguistic and historical dimensions of the period of revelation encompass the meanings common among the Arabs, as well as their speech, manners of communication and their common parlance along with their social and cultural traditions. These dimensions form the basis through which the meanings, style and various linguistic phenomena of the Qurʾān are to be understood. This can be observed in the various works on the Qurʾān, where the 'conventions' are used to observe, justify or hypothesize about the meanings of the different Qurʾanic phenomena. The use and importance of considering the relevance of Arab conventions shall be exemplified through the following examples presented in chronological order following the lives of the scholars and their works. al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsabī (d. 243 AH) explains the linguistic phenomenon of hyperbaton (*al-taqdīm wa-l-taʾḫīr*) in the Qurʾān, which was used in divine speech in God addressing His subjects in the Qurʾān: "an example of God's [style of] speech to his subjects in the Qurʾān is *muqaddam wa-muʾaḫḫar,* because the Arabs spoke like this in their own dialogues and addresses before the descent of the Book upon the Prophet".[21] Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH), in his work *Taʾwīl mushkil al-Qurʾān* stipulates that a thorough 'understanding of the manners of the Arabs and their art of expression' is a condition for grasping the meanings and merits of the Qurʾān.[22] al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) dedicated the introductory part of his exegesis to emphasize this particularity in the language of the Qurʾān; he writes: "it is not possible (*ghayru jāʾiz*) that He whose *ḏikr*[23] exalted may be, would address any of His creatures in a manner [that the addressee] cannot understand, nor would He send to any [of his subjects] a messenger with a message, except in a tongue and a parlance that the addressee understands. For, if the addressee or the recipient of a message did not understand what is being conveyed, their condition before and after receiving the message would remain the same, the delivered message would not oblige benefit to its addressees with new knowledge that they were previously oblivious about. God, exalted his *ḏikr* may be, is above sending a message or communicating with his subjects in a manner that yields no benefit for the addressee or the recipient of the message, for that would be an

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[21]   Al-Muḥāsibī, A. (1398 AH). *Kitāb Fahm Al-Qurʾān*. Ḥassan Al-Quwwatlī, (Ed.), Beirut: Dār Al-Kindī, Dār Al-Fikr, p. 476.

[22]   Ibn Qutaybah, A. (1973). *Taʾwīl Mushkil Al-Qurʾān*, Al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, (Ed.), Cairo, Egypt: Dār Al-Turāṯ, p. 12.

[23]   Ḏikr, means here 'mention', thus: 'His exalted evocation'; or 'scripture' as in 'His exalted scripture'.

imperfection and an absurdity that may not be attributed to the transcendental God".[24] Further, he maintains the importance of knowledge of the Arabic language at the time of revelation: "it is necessary that the meanings sent down upon Muḥammad in the Qurʾān to correspond with the meanings of Arab speech and that the overt quality of the speech matches the qualities of the parlance of the Arabs".[25]

In his exegesis, abū Manṣūr al-Māturidī (d. 333 AH) explains the Qurʾanic repetitions of words and meanings to be a "custom of the Arabs to repeat their speech and reiterate it as a form of emphasis."[26] abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403 AH) in turn, underlines the relevance of being versed in the customs of the Arabs by saying that the Qurʾān "addressed the Arabs according to their conventions, and what is familiar to their speech."[27] In al-Bāqillānī's view, critique of the Qurʾān is committed out of ignorance about its meanings or the manner of the speech of the Arabs.[28] He lists a number of characteristics of the Arabs' language-use such as *elaboration* and *repetition* if that was necessary for a more eloquent and effective communication or –if necessary- *brevity* and *concision*, maintaining that God addressed the Arabs in their own linguistic custom.[29] He adds that knowledge of the practical convention of the Arabs would accordingly help the reader understand the choices made by the Qurʾān in certain cases. al-Bāqillānī gives example in that regards in his response to the critique directed at the Qurʾān's description of the bliss of paradise. The choice of the Qurʾān in describing "rivers of milk, the taste of which never changes" (Muḥammad/47:15) in paradise is explained as follows: "the Arabs savor milk and crave it and prefer

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24   Al-Ṭabarī, M. (2001). *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī - Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl ʾāy Al-Qurʾān*, ʿAbdullah B. ʿAbdulmuḥsin Al-Turkī, (Ed.), Cairo: Markaz Al-Buḥūth Wa Al-Dirāsāt Al-ʿArabiyyah Wa Al-ʾislāmiyyah Bi-Dār Hajr.

25   Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī*. Vol. 1, p. 11. For further elaboration on the conventions of the arabs by Al-Ṭabarī in his Exegesis See: Al-Sharīf, ʿAbdulraḥīm. (2013). Aṣl Al-Istidlāl Bi-ʿādāt Al-ʿArab Li-Maʿrifat Maʿānī Al-Qurʾān Al-Karīm Aa-Ahamiyyat Al-Iltizām Bi-Hi Li Al-Wiqāyah Min Al-Khaṭaʾ Fī Al-Tafsīr, *Majallat Al-Sharīʿah Wa Al-Dirāsāt Al-Islāmiyyah 28* (94), p. 19-74.

26   Al-Māturīdī, A. (2005). *Taʾwīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah (Tafsīr Al-Māturīdī)*, Majdī Bāsalūm, (Ed.) (Vol. 7). Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-ʿIlmiyyah, p. 133.

27   Al-Bāqillānī, A. (2001). *Al-Intiṣār Li Al-Qurʾān*, Muḥammad ʿIṣām Al-Qudāh, (Ed.) (Vol. 2). Amman: Dār Al-Fatḥ, Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, p. 787.

28   Al-Bāqillānī, A. (1954). *Iʿjāz Al-Qurʾān*, Al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Ed.). Dār Al-Maʿārif, p. 347.

29   Al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Intiṣār Li Al-Qurʾān,* (Vol. 2), p. 800.

it to water; they even consider it [both] food and drink."[30] "Similarly, water flowing in rivers is described as 'not malodorous' and 'unchanging', for the recipients of these verses were accustomed to drinking from small wells and springs, where it is likely that water, due to its scarcity, was corrupted or altered."[31] As for the repetition of the question (فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ) "So which of the favors of your Lord would you deny", " *Fabi ayyi aalaaa'i Rabbikumaa tukazzibaan*"[32] in Sura al-Raḥmān, al-Baqillānī elucidates this in terms of the Arab manner of persuasion: "When the Arabs strive to forbid someone from injustice and corruption, they would say 'would you kill a person, while you know their innocence? Would you kill a person while you know that they are pious and faithful? Would you kill a person while you know that their prayers get answered and that they're well received among people? The speaker would go on enumerating the good qualities of the person they're trying to spare from murder out of conviction that the murderer would be restrained by knowing the good qualities [of the person they attempted to murder}. They would reiterate the mention of 'killing', not because they are repetitive or short of words, but because it is the 'very virtuosity of eloquence' (*nafsu taʿbīr al-barāʿa*) and the 'beauty of the tongue' (*ḥusn al-lasan*)".[33]

In later works, expressions like 'the custom of the Arabs' (*ʿādat al-ʿArab*), 'the speech of the Arabs' (*kalām al-ʿArab*), or 'the language of the Arabs' (*lughat al-ʿArab*)" would often be repeated to explain various matters in Qurʾanic speech. For instance, al-Ḥaṭīb al-Iskāfī (d. 420 AH) explains the rhetorical phenomenon of hyperbaton in the Qurʾān as follows: "it is the custom of the Arabs to place the idea that they want to draw attention to, first."[34] al-Wāḥidī (d. 468 AH) in turn expounds on the Qurʾān's address of the singular with the grammatical form of addressing the dual (*khiṭāb al-wāḥid bi-ḥiṭāb al-iṯnayn*), explaining it as a 'habit of the Arabs'.[35] al-Baghawī (d. 510 AH) describes the recurring repetitions in the Qurʾān as a practice that is 'adequate in the parlance of the Arabs' and

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[30]   Ibid., p. 698.

[31]   Ibid., *Al-Intiṣār Li Al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 2, p. 699.

[32]   Surat Al-Raḥmān: 55. The question "Fa-Bi-ayyi 'ālāʾi Rabbikumā Tukadhdhibān" Is Repeated 31 Times In A 78 Verse Chapter.

[33]   Al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Intiṣār Li-L-Qurʾān*. (Vol. 2), p. 807.

[34]   Al-Iskāfī, A. (2001). *Durrat Al-Tanzīl Wa Ghurrat Al-Taʾwīl*, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Aydīn (Ed.) (Vol. 1), Mecca: Jāmiʿat Umm Al-Qurā, Maʿhad Al-Buḥūth Al-ʿilmiyyah Makkah Al-Mukarramah, p. 861.

[35]   Al-Wāḥidī, M. (2008). *Al-Tafsīr Al-Basīṭ*. (Vol. 16). Riyadh: ʿImādat Al-Baḥth Al-ʿilmī – Jāmiʿat Al-Imām Muḥammad Bin Suʿūd Al-Islāmiyyah, p. 499.

similarly expounds on Qurʾanic speech in the dual-form (*al-taṯniyyah*) while addressing a single person as follows: "It is customary among the Arabs to address a single person in [the grammatical form of] the dual, for instance the Almighty's words: (أَلْقِيَا فِي جَهَنَّمَ) *ʾalqiyā fī jahannam*.[36] The jurist (*uṣūlī*), Ibn ʿUqayl al-Ḥanbalī (d. 513 AH) justifies the inclusion of women as the subject of general plural statements by pointing out that it is "customary among the people of the Arabic language to have the masculine plural form dominate in a statement that includes both masculine and feminine. This applies to both statements of fact as well as statements of commands (imperative). This is manifest in the form in which Adam and Eve were addressed by God in the Qurʾān: (قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا [البقرة: 38]) "We said, 'Go down from it all of you'" "Qulnah bitoo minhaa jamee 'an" (al-Baqarah/2:38); the imperative *ihbiṭū* is used in the masculine plural form. According to this established method of speech in the custom of the Arabs, the verse (يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا) "O you who believed", "Yaaa ayyuhal lazeena aamanoo" (al-Baqarah/2:104) – using the masculine plural form – is understood to include the feminine as well. Also, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH) comments about the specifically revealed timing of sustenance for the people of paradise being in the *mornings* and in the *afternoon* - " وَلَهُمْ رِزْقُهُمْ فِيها بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا" "and they will have their provision therein, morning and afternoon", "wa lahum rizquhum feehaa bukratanw wa 'ashiyyaa" (Maryam/19:62) - saying that "for the Arabs, a person who has lunch and dinner is a person living in luxury".[37] Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) accounts for his refusal to give the disconnected letters (*al-aḥruf al-muqaṭaʿah*) meanings by saying: "the Qurʾān was sent down in the language of the Arabs, which makes it impermissible to read meanings into [items] that the language of the Arabs could not have supported."[38] al-Ḥarālī (d. 638 AH) points to the phenomenon of ending verses with the most beautiful names of God (*asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā*), which possesses a significance recognized by the Arabs. He declares that "whoever is clever enough to grasp this phenomenon would be able to predict the ending of the verse from its content, and elaborate the content of the verse from its ending. While this was clear for the Arabs it was obscure

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[36] "Cast, Cast Into Hell" (Qāf/50:24) The imperative here is used in the grammatical form of addressing the dual. Al-Baghawī, Al-Ḥussayn Bin Masʿūd. (1420 AH). *Maʿālim Al-Tanzīl Fī Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān (Tafsīr Al-Baghawī)*, ʿAbd Al-Razāq Al-Mahdī, (Ed.), (Vol. 4). Beirut: Dār Iḥiyāʾ Al-Turāṯ Al-ʿArabī, P. 332.

[37] Al-Zamakhsharī, J. (1987). *Al-Kashāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq Wa-Ghawāmiḍ Al-Tanzīl*. (Vol. 2). Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-ʿArabī, p. 255.

[38] Al-Rāzī, F. (1999). *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb (Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr / Tafsīr Al-Rāzī)*. (Vol. 3). Beirut: Dār Iḥiyāʾ Al-Turāṯ Al-ʿArabī, p. 28.

(*istaʿjam*) for the non-Arabs (*mutaʿarribīn*), except for the obvious [cases]".[39] He further observes, that Arabs prioritize knowledge attained through sense perception over knowledge attained through rational reflection, which explains the description of the earth as a resting place precedes the description of the sky as a canopy;[40] using this form in the Qurʾān to address "a person who possesses the faculty of rational reflection elevates the (physical) sense".[41] He also justifies the Qurʾanic choice of the term *qawm* (people) in several verses, such as 'signs for people' (*la-ʾāyātin li-qawmin* in al-Baqarah/2164) as follows: "(a people) are the ones who perform (*yaqūmūn*) a matter in the best possible manner", "for it is known that the Arabs' convention to use the term *qawm* in situations [evoking] assistance and strength".[42] al-Ḥaralī also elucidates the use of the number seven to refer to the abundance of giving (in charity); "for, the Arabs use the number seven to express plenty".[43] Zayn al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 666 AH) explicates the Qurʾanic reference to the sunrise and sunset in the plural (*al-mashāriq wa-l-maghārib*) in the dual (*al-mashriqayn wa-l-maghribayn*) in some verses, or in the singular (*al-mashriq, al-maghrib*) as follows: "given that the Qurʾān was sent down in the language of the Arabs and in accordance to what has been convened in the style of their language (*al-maʿhūd min asālibi kalāmihim*) and art of expression and given the fact that among their styles is the combination of generalization and specificity and elaboration and simplicity; [the Qurʾān] generalizes sometimes '[He is] the Lord of the *two* [farthest points of] sunrises, and the Lord of the *two* [farthest points of] sunsets',[44] where He refers to the sunrises and sunsets of both the summer and winter [solstices]. [The Qurʾān] specifies sometimes: *fa-lā uqsimu bi-Rabbi Al-mashāriq wa Al-maghārib*[45] referring to all the sunset and sunrise [points] of the year, which are more than 700 hundred; the Qurʾān elaborates sometimes (فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِرَبِّ الْمَشَارِقِ وَالْمَغَارِب) *fa-lā*

[39] Al-Ḥaralī, ʿA. (1997). *Turāth Abī Al-Ḥasan Al-Ḥaralī Al-Marakishī Fī Al-Tafsīr, Muḥamādī Bin ʿAbd Al-Salām Al-Khayāṭī.* (Ed.), Rabat, Morocco: Manshūrāṭ Al-Markaz Al-Jāmiʿī Li Al-Baḥth Al-ʿīlmī, p. 38.

[40] Refers To Surat Al-Baqarah/2:22: (الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً), "Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy", "Al-Laḏī Jaʿal Lakumu Al-Arḍa Firāshan Wa As-Samāʾa Bināʾan".

[41] Al-Ḥaralī, *Turāṯ Abī Al-Ḥassan Al-Ḥaralī Al-Marakishī Fī Al-Tafsīr*, p. 298-299. This phrase occurred in Al-Baqarah/2:164 and Āl-ʿImrān/3:190 – Both verses refer to those who use their reason or their insight to recognize the wonders of God's creation.

[42] Al-Ḥaralī, *Turāṯ Abī Al-Ḥassan Al-Ḥaralī Al-Marakishī Fī Al-Tafsīr*, p. 304

[43] Ibid., p. 461.

[44] Al-Raḥmān/55:17.

[45] Al-Maʿārij/70:40.

uqsimu bi-Rabbi l- mashāriq wa-l-maghārib, and [sometimes] it simplifies *wa-Rabbu l-mashāriq*[46] given that the mentioned *mashāriq* include to the elliptic *maghārib.*"[47]

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) declares that it is obligatory to "know the language, the custom and the convention (*ʿurf*) in which the Qurʾān and the Sunnah were sent down and [be familiar] with what the companions understood when they heard these words; for, they were addressed by God and His Messenger in this language and in these customs and conventions and not in what ensued hereafter".[48] He attributes the main cause of the discrepancy in the exegesis of those who employ proof in understanding the text to their negligence of the context of the communication. He says: "(they are) people who interpret the Qurʾān based on what they deem acceptable to have been said by those who speak the Arabic language in general, without consideration of the [language of the] speaker of the [language of the] Qurʾān, [the language of he upon whom] the book descended or [the language] of the addressee." So they "take into account merely the words and their acceptable meanings if uttered by an Arab, with no regard for what is suited for the speaker [in the Qurʾān] and for the context of the speech. These people often err when it comes to understanding the meaning of a word used in a linguistic context."[49] Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH) confirms that "God has sent down the Qurʾān in the language of the Arabs and in their manner; so all that was deemed good in customs of the Arabs was used the revelation of the Qurʾān."[50] al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH) establishes a connection between the Qurʾān's style in negation: where the Qurʾān would express a conditional negation (*nafī muqayyad*), while it means to express absolute negation (*nafī muṭlaq*), such as the Qurʾanic statement (وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّينَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ) "and (they) kill the prophets without right", "wa yaqtuloonan Nabiyyeena bighairil haqq" (Al-Baqarah 2/61), which may mislead the feeble-minded that it is sometimes

46   Al-Ṣāfāt/37:5.
47   Al-Rāzī, Z. (1991). *Unmuḏaj Jalīl Fī Asʾilah Wa Wajibah ʿan Gharāʾib Āy Al-Tanzīl.* Al-Maṭrūdī ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān Bin Ibrāhīm, (Ed.), Riyadh: Dār ʿālam Al-Kutub, P. 433.
48   Ibn Taymiyyah, T. (1995). *Majmūʿ Al-Fatāwā,* ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān Bin Muḥammad Ibn Qāsim (Ed.) (Vol. 7). Medina: Mujammaʿ Al-Malik Fahd Li-Ṭibāʿat Al-Muṣḥaf Al-Sharīf, p. 106.
49   Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ Al-Fatāwā,* Vol. 13, p. 355.
50   Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah. (N.D.). *Badāʾiʿ Al-Fawāʾid.* (Vol. 1). Beirut: Dār Al-Kitāb Al-ʿArabī, p. 46.

permissible to do so.[51] He explains it as an Arabic form of hyperbole-negation and gives an example of a typical Arabic statement: "'The good of this person cannot be hoped for'[52], this statement is not intended to say, that this person has good in them that is not desired by the speaker, but rather that there is no good in them in any way shape or form".[53]

Accordingly, the conventions of the Arabs in their language use and rhetorical styles are an important reference for a proper understanding of Qurʾanic terminology and expressions, which is further confirmed by Ibn al-Najjār (d. 972 AH), a later jurist who stresses the relevance of proper knowledge about the legitimate and accepted use of language among the Arabs. This emphasis comes in context of his discussion about those who seek to produce proof from the Qurʾanic text for deriving legislation: "knowledge about the circumstances of the Arabs is inevitable for interpreting the Qurʾān and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) according to what is *most* plausible among the Arabs and their manner of speech, the *less* plausible yet sanctioned by their speech notwithstanding".[54]

3.   THE CONVENTIONS OF THE ARABS AND THE 'UNLETTERED' (*UMIYYŪN*) IN THE WORK OF AL-IMĀM AL-SHĀṬIBĪ

The previous section was a presentation of sporadic examples of the different facets of the Islamic tradition's attention to *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* at the time of revelation; whether as a general theoretical matter or as one of practical application to specific verses. In spite of the agreement among scholars on the significance of *maʿhūd al-ʿArab*, it has neither acquired the status of an epistemic category within the principles of jurisprudence, nor did it become a standard science in the discipline of Qurʾanic Studies. The only exception to this being the study of the 'reasons of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*); where the conventions of the Arabs and their impact on the signification of the text have been duly noted, especially in the derivation of norms and legislation (*istinbāṭ al-aḥkām*). This, however, is the exception that proves the rule and bolsters my view that a significant foundation in Qurʾanic hermeneutics fell into disuse; and was merely

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[51] "Wa Yaqtulūna N-Nabiyyin Bi-Ghayri Ḥaqq" – This expression occurs twice: In Al-Baqarah/2:61 And Āl-ʿImrān/3:21

[52] In other words, "You cannot expect any good to come from that person"

[53] Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān*. Vol. 3, P. 396.

[54] Ibn Al-Najjār,T. (1997). *Sharḥ Al-Kawkab Al-Munīr*, Muḥammad Al-Zuḥaylī And Nazīh Ḥammād (Eds.) (Vol. 4), Riyad: Obeikan, p. 463–464.

employed as a tool of -retroactive- rationalization or justification of specific meanings, but fell short of being recognized as a foundational source of knowledge. It may be argued, that the neglect of this fundamental principle has contributed to tolerating -somewhat inaccurate- interpretations of parts of the text – and perhaps to (mis-)understanding the text as a source of legislation in general. This is what led al-imām al-Shāṭibī to expand on this principle -in *Kitāb al-maqāṣid*[55]- in his elaboration of "the aims of the Lawgiver in laying down the *sharīʿah* for the comprehension [of the subject]" and not in the study of the legal sources themselves, i.e. a-Qurʾān and the Sunnah (*mabāḥith al-adillah*). The rationale behind this classification by al-Shāṭibī may be his observation that many matters examined under the umbrella of *sharīʿah* were in fact unrelated to the essential purposes of *sharīʿah*. For that reason, he wanted to establish this basic foundation, to ensure that the meaning deduced from the 'legal sources' matches the understanding of the Arabs at the time of revelation. Therefore, he coined the principle of 'the conventions of the Arabs' (*maʿhūd al-ʿArab*) or 'the conventions of the unlettered' (*maʿhūd al-umiyyīn*) and was the first to employ this expression as a *terminus technicus*: "(…) these are the Arabs in whose language the Qurʾān was revealed. If there was a recognized ongoing usage (*ʿurf*) in the Arab tongue, it is not valid to deviate from such usage in the understanding of the *sharīʿah*. If no such usage [has survived], it is not valid to apply meanings for its understanding that were not known to the Arabs. This applies to meanings, words and modes of expression."[56]

Al-Shāṭibī reiterates his imperative that the *sharīʿah* must be in accordance with the customs of the unlettered Arabs, because "the *sharīʿah* was laid down with the attribute of being unlettered, because the addressees were such." He elaborates: "(…) it is attributed to an unlettered people. If it was not the case, then this implies that it was in a form [of reasoning] that was different from the one known to the Arabs, but they would then not find it within themselves to recognize it. This goes against the facts in this case. It is, therefore, necessary that it be in a form that the Arabs knew. The Arabs, however, knew nothing more than what Allah attributed to them with respect to being unlettered. The *sharīʿah* is, thus, [of the] unlettered."[57]

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[55] Literally "The Book of Purposes", Addressing his theory of the higher objectives and intents of Islamic Law.

[56] Al-Shāṭibī, I. (2014). *The Reconciliation of The Fundamentals Of Islamic Law*, Raji M. Rummany (Ed.)(Vol. 11) Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (Trans.), , The Great Books Of Islamic Civilization, UK: Garnet Publishing, p. 62.

[57] Ibid., p. 55.

The conventions that al-Shāṭibī is pointing at are of comprehensive significance and are not limited to language, philology or semantics, but also encompass the Qurʾanic modes of demonstration, he pointed that the Arabs were provided with demonstration of the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) through what was known to them, such as the heavens, the earth, the mountains, clouds and plants as well as with demonstrations regarding the Hereafter and the proofs of prophecy. In addition, given that what had remained among them from the laws of the earlier prophets was that of their father Abraham (PBUH), they were addressed with regards to that.[58] As for the nature of the Hereafter, al-Shāṭibī points out that it was described in the Qurʾān only in accordance with what was known to the Arabs from among the blessings of the here-and-now; this is obvious in the types of sustenance mentioned, which were all known to them such as water, milk, wine, honey, palms, grapes and the rest that they were familiar with, while [items like] nuts, apples and pears and other fruits from agricultural and non-Arab lands were referred to by generic term of 'fruits'.[59] From these examples from particular cases, al-Shāṭibī makes the general observation that his method of appealing to the convention of the Arabs can lift all ambiguities in the interpretation of the text which illustrates that the creed was unlettered and its clauses did not extend beyond what the Arabs knew. al-Shāṭibī's articulates his motivation for elaborating this principle, i.e. that people transgressed every limit in making claims about the Qurʾān, using it to justify every science from the earlier as well as the later scholars. This includes the 'natural sciences' (*al-ṭabīʿiyyāt*), the *quadrivium* (*al-taʿālīm*), logic (*al-manṭiq*), the science of [the meaning of] letters (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) and all that has been the subject of theory and hypothesis in these arts and similar, which if tested against what preceded [of the convention of the Arabs] would be disproven.[60] We may therefore conclude with al-Shāṭibī that it is "improper to attribute to the Qurʾān what it does not imply. Likewise, it is improper to deny what the Qurʾān implies. It is necessary to confine oneself in

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[58]   Ibid., p. 60. This reference to the Abrahamic tradition may well be used as a sold platform for engaging the biblical tradition as part and parcel of maʿhūd Al-ʿArab. The Arabs did not possess a scripture in their own language, but were familiar with the tradition. Sydney Griffith's Notion of the 'Interpreted Bible' that encompasses the Qurʾān would serve as the most appropriate candidate for this function, see his article "The Sunna of Our Messengers": The Qurʾān's paradigm for Messengers and Prophets, A reading of sūrat ash-shuʿarāʾ (26)' In Neuwirth, Angelika .(2016). And Michael A. Sells (Eds), Qurʾānic Studies Today, Routledge,.

[59]   Al-Shāṭibī, *Reconciliation*, p. 60.

[60]   Ibid., p. 61.

seeking support for understanding its meanings to all that is attributed to the knowledge of the Arabs exclusively."[61]

From what preceded a number of conditions regarding the manner in which *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* is best considered may be deduced from al-Shāṭibī's writings:

1. To restrict oneself to the bounds and limitations of the language of the Arabs, for it would be improper for the interpreter of the Qurʾān or the Sunnah to give it meanings beyond that which the tongue of the Arabs tolerates. A person discussing the Qurʾān and the Sunnah ought to concern themselves with what the Arabs concerned themselves with and not transgress these limitations.

2. Comprehension (of the texts) ought to conform to the shared understanding of the Arabs. Namely, it is binding to understand the Qurʾān and the Sunnah based on the shared meanings of all the Arabs.

3. Broader meanings in the matters (of *sharīʿah*) take priority, especially in matters that include both the layman and the specialist (*al-khāṣah wa al-ʿāmah*). It is thus binding to comprehend the *sharīʿah* in light of the shared understanding, which enables the unlettered as well as others to comprehend. Hence, "stipulating elements that the general public cannot understand is a deviation from the purposes of the unlettered *sharīʿah*."[62] He further observes that the matters that frequently lead to discrepancies in understanding are the 'absolute matters' (*al-umūr al-muṭlaqah*) that are left for the evaluation of the subject, for no concrete limitation has been set by *sharīʿah*. In these cases, obligations are left to the personal evaluation of the subject, where a person is only obliged to meet the level which they comprehend; carrying out an obligation therefore depends on the subject's ability. "If a person is not able to carry it out at a certain level, then he is not commanded to do so; rather he has to meet a lower standard."[63]

4. Meanings take priority over utterances: the ultimate objective of divine communication is the conveyance of meanings, which is evident in the central position Arabs give to meanings. For, they are willing to mend the choice of words for the sake of preserving the meanings. This makes utterances merely a means to an end – meaning remains the ultimate goal of communication. In Arab

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[61] Ibid., p. 62.
[62] Ibid., p. 68.
[63] Ibid., p. 70.

communication, the meaning of an individual word would be given up if the contextual meaning is comprehended without it. This is often overlooked in the examination and study of the Qurʾān and the Sunnah; where arcane meanings are sought after for a purpose other than what is properly relevant to the text. This results in the meaning of the text becoming obscure and vague, especially for those who seek to understand the Book but are not familiar with the objectives of communication among the Arabs, thus misleading them in their search and purpose.

5.   The meanings that are current among the community (*al-maʿnā al-istiʿmālī*) take precedence over the meanings that are derived by analogical reasoning (*al-maʿnā al-qiyāsī*). al-Shāṭibī addressed this criterion in light of his discussion of the universal signification (*al-dalālah al-ʿāmah*), where he emphasizes the relevance of giving priority to current connotations/purposes (*al-maqāṣid al-istiʿmāliyyah*), even if the 'originally convened meaning' (*al-waḍʿ*) is different. This criterion gives priority to the current and used meanings, as opposed to the analogically understood meanings. In the fundamentals of Arabic linguistics, if the used meaning diverged from the analogical meaning, the used meaning takes over. This is evident in the parlance of the Arabs, who may use expressions generically in contexts where the statement has a specific meaning, which is different than that which the individual words express. Arabs may equally use these expressions generically to actually mean the 'originally convened meaning' of these words. These different interpretations of a statement may only be inferred by observing the context of the utterance.[64]

6.   Consideration must be given for the 'contextual requirements' (*muqtaḍayāt al-aḥwāl*) and the 'reasons of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) for understanding the meaning and determining the purposes of the speech of the Arabs. According to this criterion, al-Shāṭibī correlated between knowledge about the linguistic conventions of the Arabs and the 'reasons of revelation'. Namely, the sciences of rhetoric and semantics, which is the cornerstone for grasping the

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[64]   Al-Shāṭibī, I. Al-Muwāfaqāt. (2017). *Al-Hussein Ayt Saeed* (Ed.) (Vol. 4), Doha: Minister of Endowments (Awqaf) And Islamic Affairs, p. 534-35. Note : I am referring here to the Arabic version because a full translation is not yet available. It should also be noted that i returned to the arabic version before referring to the translation every elsewhere.

'inimitable composition of the Qurʾān' (*iʿjāz naẓm al-Qurʾān*) – let alone comprehension of the purposes of any utterance– revolves around the knowledge of the contextual settings; be that the circumstances of the utterance as such, or those of the speaker or the addressee, or all of them together. For, the one and the same utterance may be understood differently depending on the circumstances and context of the interlocutors and depending on other factors. For instance, a question may be a statement of facts or a form of reproach. Also, an imperative may be used to 'grant permission', or to issue a 'threat', or to evoke 'puzzle' or to 'silence' the addressee. Only external circumstances give the listener the correct signification of these statement; which can be judged based on the context. Yet, not all contexts may be transmitted through the utterance, nor can all circumstantial 'evidence' (*qarīnah*) accompany this utterance. Hence, if some of the signifying evidence and contexts go missing, the understanding of the utterance as a whole becomes problematic, and would at best be only partially understood. Knowledge of the 'occasions' (of a speech or an utterance) is then crucial in this form of communication and solves all the communication problems, which makes it inevitable in understanding the Qurʾān. Hence, knowledge of the 'occasion' implies necessarily knowledge of the 'contextual' circumstance.[65]

From what preceded regarding al-Shāṭibī's attention to *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* for understanding the Qurʾān we note that, although he emphasized the principle of 'the convention of the Arabs',[66] his purpose had a broader connotation. It includes not only the literary and linguistic dimensions on the levels of meanings, utterances and style, but also encompasses aspects pertaining to customs and conventions, as well as social and historical circumstances at the time of

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65   Ibid., Vol. 4, P. 694

66   Yaḥyā Ramaḍān observes that Al-Shāṭibī highly depends on Al-Shāfiʿī in his understanding of the centrality of the Arabic tongue, where Al-Shāṭibī pursues the introduced by Al-Shāfiʿī and elaborates on the theory so as to include other dimensions of linguistics and rhetoric. See: Ramaḍān, Yaḥyā. (2007). Al-Qirāʾah Al-Siyāqiyyah ʿind Al-Uṣūlyīn: Qirāʾāh Fī Mafhūm Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab ʿind Al-Shāṭibī. *Majallat Al-Iḥiyāʾ, Al-Rābiṭah Al-Muḥammadiyyah, Morocco 25*, p. 113–24. Muḥammad Kamāl Al-Dīn Imām emphasizes that Al-Shāṭibī is a continuation of Al-Shāfiʿī. See: Imām, Muḥammad Kamāl Al-Dīn. (2007). Al-Maʿnā Wa-L-Siyāq Bayn Al-Shāfiʿī Wa Al-Shāṭibī: Ruʾyah Maqāṣidiyyah, *Majallat Al-Iḥiyāʾ, Al-Rābiṭah Al-Muḥammadiyyah, Morocco 26*, p. 82–87.

revelation. Importantly, it encompasses their religious and cultural beliefs, which includes elements from the Abrahamic tradition. In addition, it comprises the direct circumstances concurrent with the revelation, which he termed 'contextual requirements' (*muqtaḍayāt al-aḥwāl*), which are mainly addressed under the rubric of 'reasons of revelation'. Paying attention to the 'conventions of the Arabs' is no simple matter, for not only does it require deep and thorough linguistic, literary and historical knowledge, but also needs to be based on established epistemic foundations and a thorough study of the social, religious and cultural situation at the time of revelation. That is, in addition to the direct circumstances and conditions that accompanied the revelation of particular verses and suras. The great difficulty posed by considering all these dimensions may explain the absence of the principle of *maʿhūd al-ʿAarab* from Qurʾanic Studies, and why scholars contented with dispersed hints to some aspects of this principle whenever some relevant data was readily obtainable. Despite the fact that al-Shāṭibī came at a later stage in the development of Qurʾanic Studies this lacuna has persisted throughout the history and development of the science of *tafsīr*. As a principle of Qurʾanic interpretation, the consideration of the 'conventions of the Arabs' never enjoyed sufficient attention, even after the time and works of al-Shāṭibī, yet, from among the later scholars, the Indian exegete ʿAbdulḥamīd al-Farāhī was aware of the relevance of this principle and addressed it more thoroughly.

4. THE SPEECH OF THE OLD ARABS AND THE COHERENCE OF THE QURʾĀN (*NIẒĀM AL-QURʾĀN*) IN THE WORKS OF ʿABDULḤAMĪD AL-FARĀHĪ

The contemporary Indian exegete ʿAbdulḥamīd al-Farāhī (d. 1930 AD) paid attention to at least one aspect pointed out by al-Shāṭibī that concerns the consideration of the conventions of the Arabs. al-Farāhī recognized a problem in the understanding of individual Qurʾanic vocabulary: commentaries depend on the linguistic lexical meanings of words without looking into their etymology or the history of the words and the extent of its currency among the Arabs at the time of revelation. al-Farāhī thus suggests that an exegete should first ponder upon the speech of the old Arabs to attain an accurate understanding of the meaning of a word during the time of revelation – an approach al-Farāhī attempted to apply himself in his work *Mufradāt al-Qurʾān*. However, if reconstructing the old meanings of the words proves to be too difficult, an exegete is to look at the 'internal composition' of the Qurʾān (*niẓām al-Qurʾān*) to be able to comprehend the meanings of the words – an approach al-Farāhī elbaorated in his exegetical work *Niẓām al-Qurʾān*. He justifies the relevance of this approach, which was not mentioned by the Prophet and the companions, by

saying that the predecessors were in no need for such an approach during their time: "the tongue [in which the Qurʾān was revealed] was their tongue, the style [of speech] was their style and the matters [under consideration] were their matters, we don't share [these elements] with them." [67] If we were living at the time of revelation, the manner of composition and the style of speech would not have seemed obscure for us. He further warrants the relevance of looking into the speech of the old Arabs by saying that their utterances and the language of the Qurʾān itself is the primary reference for the comprehension of all literal and metaphorical meanings of words and styles of speech. For him, language books – i.e. Arabic dictionaries and lexicons – are inadequate, for they do not provide absolute definitions, nor do they differentiate between original Arabic words and subsequently generated terminology, nor do they lead to the source of the meaning, leaving the reader confused as to which is the core meaning and which meaning is offset from the original, and confused between literal and figurative meanings. Hence, according to al-Farāhī, "those who did not speak the language of the Arabs and solely relied on lexical sources would fail to ascertain the real Qurʾanic meanings.[68]

al-Farāhī is well aware of the hurdles that face his approach; such as the matters of falsified or 'erroneously attributed' literary materials (*al-manḫūl*) or the 'anomalous' (*al-shāḏ*) forms of speech attributed to the Arabs. He observes that "it is not difficult for a fluent and critical person to distinguish between the falsified and correct (meanings). Hence, we may only apply established meanings to the Qurʾān."[69] He further cautions against adopting irregular meanings, which are not established in the language (of the Arabs), for "it opens the widest doors to strife (*fitan*) and disagreement (*iḫtilāf*) among the community (*ummah)*".[70] Furthermore, he contends that the sciences of grammar and rhetoric would not suffice for the proper comprehension of the Qurʾān. Therefore, an exegete ought not to exaggerate the application of the rules of grammar in understanding the word of God; leading him to misinterpret the text and even attempt to 'restore' its divergent meanings, inevitably leading the exegete astray. It is, thus,

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[67] Al-Farāhī, ʿA. (2008). *Tafsīr Niẓām Al-Qurʾān Wa-Taʾwīl Al-Furqān Bi Al-Furqān.* India: Al-Dāʾirah Al-Ḥamīdiyyah, p. 22.

[68] Al-Farāhī, *Tafsir Niẓām Al-Qurʾān*, p. 32. Al-Farāhī, ʿA. (2002). *Mufradāt Al-Qurʾān*, Muḥammad Ajmal Ayūb Al-Iṣlāḥī (Ed.), Beirut: Dār Al-Gharb Al-Islāmī, p. 98.

[69] Al-Farāhī, *Tafsīr Niẓām Al-Qurʾān*, p. 32.

[70] Ibid.

incumbent upon a commentator to refer to old Arabic poetry to substantiate his understanding of the meanings of the text.

The same applies to the science of rhetoric (*ʿilm al-bayān*); which "inevitably falls short in facing the challenge of comprehending words coming from a living heart, let alone understanding the words pouring down from the heavens of revelation. The receiver of revelation (viz. the Prophet) or rather every person calling to the truth, spontaneously speaks his heart according to the circumstances of his context; sometimes employing figurative speech and sometimes using literal expressions. His sole consideration in his expression is the comprehension of his audience and the linguistic customs. (A prophet) would therefore use words like the son and the father (*ibn, abb*); talks of his body being divided into many bodies (*jusūm*); alludes to transferring his flesh and blood into someone else's. He would further use words like 'hand' (*yad*), 'leg' (*sāq*), 'face' (*wajh*), 'throne' (*ʿarsh*), 'chair' (*kursī*), and 'unclench'/'extend'/'grant' and 'clench'/'withhold' (*basṭ, qabḍ*), 'dispersion'/'resurrection' and 'folding' (*nashr, ṭayy*), 'regret'/'woe' (*ḥasrah*) and 'revenge' (*intiqām*), 'wrath' (*ghaḍab)* and 'compassion' (*ḥanān*), all of which the addressee would understand (in due context). Yet, whoever restricts himself to the science of rhetoric [will progress] at the pace of an ant and walk [awkwardly] like the blind."[71]

Al-Farāhī further attributes the causes of misapprehensions in the comprehension of words and speeches to be either a problem of the non-Arabs or of those who are unfamiliar with the Arab tongue, which would lead them to error "of the correct circumstances, which, in turn, results in inferring meanings that the word was not intended to convey."[72] He expresses his skepticism of the validity of the claim that "some companions – may God be pleased with them – were ignorant of the meanings of some words."[73] He explains the miscomprehension of certain words in terms of ignorance of their meanings, which results in faulty understandings deviant from the original intention. Or, it may be attributed to ignorance of dealing with these words; leaving the reader unaware of the composition of the speech or the signification of its patterns.[74] As a linguist, he is not opposed to the use of historical etymology and for obscure words, he recommends "looking at the origin from which [a word] is derived as well as its use in the sister-languages of the Arabic, such as classical Hebrew and Syriac."[75]

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Al-Farāhī, *Mufradāt Al-Qurʾān*, p. 100.
[73] Ibid., P. 109.
[74] Ibid., P. 112.
[75] Ibid., P. 114.

This open-minded manner of construing the scope of the 'conventions of the Arabs' is license to a broader incorporation of Biblical elements in interpreting Qurʾanic materials that were embedded in the culture and society of the Arabs through their religious rituals and beliefs. The editor of *Mufradāt al-Qurʾān*, points out the fact that al-Farāhī's reflections about the Qurʾān and his proficiency of pre-Qurʾanic Arabic poetry often led him to different conclusions than those commonly found in dictionaries and commentaries. He sheds new light on terms like *ʾālāʾ* (favors), *ḥard* (determination),[76] *aḥwā* (dark),[77] and *al-ʿaṣr* (time).[78] He also took advantage of his knowledge of classical Hebrew in defining words that have joined origins, rebutting the claims of orientalists that the Qurʾān 'borrowed' non-Arabic terms from the Jews and the Christians and assumed an organically shared religious language. This is manifest in his definition of the words *al-abb* (the father), *safarah* (messenger-angels),[79] *dars* (study), and *ṣalāh* (prayer).

While al-Farāhī's theory has not been fully put into practice of his theorization into a work of exegesis, the theory is based on two main aspects: the first is the consideration for the meanings of words at the time of revelation and the second is the consideration for the 'internal composition' of the Qurʾān (*niẓām*) in defining the signification of terms. Both these aspects find their origins in the theories of al-Shāṭibī, for the reconstruction of the meaning of a word according to its meaning at the time of revelation is central to the consideration of the conventions of the Arabs. As for the examination of the 'internal composition' of the Qurʾān in comprehending Qurʾanic meanings, it was similarly expressed by al-Shāṭibī who maintains that "established scholars treat the *sharīʿah* (the Canon) as one coherent image in their derivation of evidence; taking into consideration its holistic character that is derived from its parts, as well as its general aspects that depend on its specifics, as well as the unqualified [rulings] that limit the qualified [rulings] and the broadly expressed yet elucidated by the specifically elaborated, and all other different dimensions of the *sharīʿah*. Accordingly, when the observer derives a ruling based on the totality of these factors, this is the ruling

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[76] Occurs only once in Surat Al-Qalam/68:25: (وَغَدَوْا عَلَىٰ حَرْدٍ قَادِرِينَ), "And they went early in determination [Assuming Themselves] Able", "Wa Ghadaw 'Alaa Hardin Qaadireen".

[77] Occurs only once in Surat Al-Aʿlā/87:5: "Then Made It Dry And Dark".

[78] Occurs as an oath at the beginning of Sura 103 baring the same name "Al-ʿaṣr".

[79] This word has one occurrence in the qurʾan in Q 80:15.

that was intended in its initial utterance".[80] One may add here that al-Shāṭibī pointed out in various parts of his work, the relevance of observing the relation between the Meccan and Medinan verses and the importance of interpreting the verses in correlation to one another, in addition to correlating the individual verses to their contexts in the sura and understanding the Qurʾān as a single unit.

Nevertheless, the central difference between al-Shāṭibī and al-Farāhī is clear in their respective approaches; the former views the 'conventions of the Arabs' and the coherence of the Qurʾān from the perspective of a jurist establishing methods for the derivation of rulings, while the latter approaches the old language of the Arabs and the coherence of the Qurʾān from the perspective of his search for the signification of the text (*dalālat al-naṣṣ*). al-Shāṭibī, *uṣūlī* leanings and al-Farāhī exegetical interests are strongly visible in their theories, and in their handling of the text.

The foundations established by al-Shāṭibī and al-Farāhī are combined in a concise summary provided by Ibn Taymiyyah, which encompasses both the relevance of the 'contextual requirements' (*muqtaḍā al-aḥwāl*) – including the utterance and the speaker as well as the conventions at the time of revelation (*maʿhūd ʿaṣr an-nuzūl*) on the one hand, and the relevance of the internal coherence of the Qurʾān on the other. Ibn Taymiyyah writes: "A word [can only be intelligibly] used [in a context] restricted by interlocutory conventions, as for the circumstance, be it that of the speaker or the listener, there is no alternative to considering it in all forms of speech. If the speaker is known one comprehends aspects of his speech that one would not have otherwise, for knowledge of the speaker entails knowing his conventions and style. The significance of a word, in turn, [is known] if the language of the speaker is known, [by language] is meant the linguistic habits and customs and of the speaker that are employed in his speech. That a word signifies a meaning is an intentional voluntary choice; thus the speaker intends the meaning that a certain word signifies. As such, if a speaker is accustomed to using a certain word to express a specific meaning, then, this is his language. Accordingly, whoever pays special attention to the word-choice of the Prophet and the purpose of his speech would know his parlance and would be able to understand his intention, while others who do not have the same knowledge about the Prophet would not be able to comprehend the same meanings from his speech. He should therefore seek –in the case a word from the Qurʾān or the Hadith is mentioned- this word's 'equivalent' (alt. synonyms,

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[80]   Al-Shāṭibī, I. (2008). *Al-Iʿtiṣām*, Muḥammad ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān Al-Shuqayr Et Al., (Eds.), Saudi Arabia: Dār Ibn Al-Jawzī Li Al-Nashr Wa Al-Tawzīʿ.

naẓāʾir): what did God and his Prophet mean by it? Which in turn will lead him to understand the language of the Qurʾān and the Hadith and the Sunnah of God and his Messenger with which He addresses his subjects and that -language- is the known custom –that is made evident by His- speech. Now if that manner has equivalents in the language of others, and that these equivalents were numerous, then one can infer that this language and custom is a common and shared [practice] that is not specific to the Prophet (PBUH) but rather the language of his community. It is, thereafter, not permissible to interpret his words based on the linguistic customs of subsequent peoples that were not common in his speech or in the speech of his companions."[81] Ibn Taymiyyah adds that "in interpreting the Qurʾān and Hadith it is indispensable to have knowledge of that which indicates what God and the Prophet intended by [these] utterances and how his words are to be understood. As such, knowing the Arabic [language], with which we were addressed is an aid in the comprehension of the intention of God and his Messenger; this, in addition to knowledge of the way utterances signify meanings".[82]

The approach Ibn Taymiyyah presents in this section, expresses the same principles that al-Shāṭibī inaugurated and al-Farāhī elaborated after him – that is the relevance of paying great attention to *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* at the time of revelation (which includes the speaker, the listener, the manner of speech, etc.). In addition to that, the 'internal composition' of language of the Qurʾān ought to be considered to enable the reader to infer knowledge about the parts from the whole. Both dimensions (consideration of the conventions of the Arabs and consideration of the internal composition of the Qurʾān) complement one another; the latter dimension fills the gaps left by the former. This is what al-Farāhī sought after in his commentary N*iẓām al-Qurʾān*, where he instituted rules for weighing out interpretations based on the internal composition of the text.

5. CONCLUSION

The contemporary interest in the study of the 'Purposes of Divine Law' (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*) raised the scholars' interest in the works of al-Shāṭibī especially his notion of *maʿhūd al-ʿArab,* which received considerable attention, and became

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[81] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmūʿ Al-Fatāwā*, Vol. 7, P. 114-115.
[82] Ibid., P. 116.

the subject of various contemporary scholarly works.[83] However, these works are either concerned with the linguistic dimension of the theory – comparing it to theories of pragmatics concerned with the concept of the context (*siyāq*) and its relevance – or concerned with its use as a principle of *uṣūl* pertaining to the language of the text and the conditions for its proper legal interpretation. While the approach of these studies is well justified within their respective disciplines, this principle has other dimensions that are equally worthy of attention and scholarly investigation. The present study seeks to draw attention to a neglected aspect in Qurʾanic Studies that would fill ample lacunae in the theories of interpretation.

However, al-Shāṭibī's reference to the 'customs of the Arabs' (*ʿādāt al-ʿArab*) or the 'manners of the Arabs' (*asālīb al-ʿArab*) for the interpretation of Qurʾanic materials, and his application of the concept 'the conventions of the Arabs' (*maʿhūd al-ʿArab*) to include social, religious, cultural and civilizational as well as linguistic dimensions of the time of revelation, are still absent as a fundamental principle of exegesis that ought to be taken into account. While al-Farāhī noticed and tried to redress its absence from a linguistic perspective, the neglect of this principle in exegetical matters is greater and broader. Even in cases where the context of the verse and the conventions of the Arabs are known, they are absented from the interpretive process. This reality is made all the more incomprehensible when we consider that the greatest source for the conventions of the Arabs is none other than the discipline closest to the text, i.e. 'reasons of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Yet the content and significance that these provide have been rendered otiose through the juristic axiom 'the lessons are drawn from the general meanings of the terms and not from the specific reason (for their revelation)'.[84]

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[83] For Example, See: ʿAbd Al-Salām, Aḥmad Shaykh. (2002). Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab Fī Talaqī Al-Khiṭāb Al-Dīnī, *Majallat Al-Sharīʿah Wa Ad-Dirasāt Al-Islāmiyyah, University Of Kuwait 17* (48), p. 63–111; Imām, Muḥammad Kamāl Al-Dīn, "Al-Maʿnā Wa-L-Siyāq Bayn Al-Shāfiʿī Wa Al-Shāṭibī: Ruʾyah Maqāṣidiyyah"; Ramaḍān, Yaḥyā, "Al-Qirāʾah Al-Siyāqiyyah ʿind Al-Uṣūliyīn: Qirāʾāh Fī Mafhūm Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab ʿind Al-Shāṭibī"; Al-Khaṭīb, Muḥammad ʿAbdulfattāḥ. (2014). "Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab Fī Al-Khiṭāb Wa-Ishkāliyyat Qirāʾat Al-Naṣṣ Al-Sharʿī" *Majallat Al-Tartīl, Al-Rābiṭah Al-Muḥammadiyyah Li Al-ʿUlamāʾ2*, p. 51–78. For the application of the conventions of the Arabs (As A Hermeneutic Principle) among Qurʾanic commentaries See: Naqqāz, Ismāʿīl. (2014). "Maʿhūd Al-ʿArab fī talaqqī al-khiṭāb Al-Qurʾānī: Qirāʾah fī Tafsīr Al-Ẓilāl Li-Sayyid Quṭb," *Majallat Al-Ḥiwār Al-Mutawassiṭī, Jāmiʿat Al-Jīlālī, Algeria 13–14*, p. 133–48.

[84] Al-ʿIbrah Bi-ʿumūm Al-Lafẓ Lā Bi-Khuṣūṣ As-Sabab.

This article calls for greater attention to this neglected yet fundamental principle of Qurʾanic Studies with all its various dimensions, and calls for the investment of this principle in interpreting the text. It provides a more thorough understanding of the text's meanings; and allows for an accurate distinction between cases where the meaning is intended as an absolute truth, and cases where the verse is making a qualified statement.[85] Moreover, our negligence of the historical conventions of the Arabs, from a contemporary perspective, will lead the reader to make inaccurate inferences based on a faulty understanding of the historicity of text. Important to recall here that the sort of understanding of the conventions of the Arabs that is advocated here is not limited to the linguistic dimension, which, significantly, includes consideration of other Semitic languages close to Arabic, as al-Farāhī argued. It includes as well various social and religious factors mentioned in the Qurʾān going beyond that which is mentioned in *asbāb an-nuzūl*, which will assist in the comprehension of verses that have legal connotations. Detailed comprehension of the social conventions and religious beliefs of the Arabs should provide a more precise understanding of the verses pertaining to cultural matters, where knowledge about *asbāb an-nuzūl* and the linguistic significations alone do not suffice. Similarly, the study of the Qurʾanic style of reasoning and argumentation ought to be understood – as pointed out by al-Shāṭibī – in light of the styles of the Arabs at the time of revelation; without retrospectively applying theories that evolved in later periods.

Scholars of the Qurʾān have displayed great understanding of the importance of considering the conventions of the Arabs, but fell short of incorporating them in their analyses. The scarcity of sources and information about the era of revelation may, to a large part, be the underlying cause for the neglect of this principle. This produced a persistent lacuna in the disciplines of Arabic and Islamic studies as a whole. Even on the linguistic level, there is still a lot of work to be done; *al-*

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[85]   To illustrate this point we can consider a subsidiary principle that produces varying significations as long as they remain applicable to the contexts. Consider the article 'al'. an examination of maʿhūd al-ʿarab shows that the article 'al' is either the general and definite al- (Al At-Taʿrīf) or it could be referring to a specific subject or object in a given (Textual) Context, I.E. 'Al' Al-ʿahd, which is its original function, if it is used to define a class. in order to grasp the correct signification of the 'al' in a given phrase, the internal textual context or the historical external context ought to be considered. even though this possibility is likely to apply and even though there are various co-texts that prove the use of 'al' to fulfil the function of 'al- al-ʿahd', it has not been taken into consideration in any of the verses related to legal rulings. i have addressed this topic in another forthcoming study.

Muʿjam al-tāriḫī li-l-lughah al-ʿArabiyyah (the Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language) has certainly revived interest in the relevance of of what is here proposed, but work is still in progress. Worth mentioning in this context is the project *Corpus Coranicum* at the *Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, a part of which focuses on 'Texts from the Environment of the Qurʾān', which purportedly assembles some of the available texts from the period of the Qurʾān in order to provide a better understanding of the language, culture and customs of the time. The sort of epistemological assumptions that are made in such a project are not alien to the Islamic tradition, as this article has shown. The notion of *umiyyūn,* which was translated here as 'unlettered' may quite legitimately be rendered as 'scripture-less', in the way al-Shāfiʿī himself understood the term.[86] As such, one may read his desire to programmatically incorporate *sharīʿat l-umiyyīn* into the general character of *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* as a theological premise to define the background beliefs of the first community, and thus regulate the interpretation of the Arabic scripture.

The methodological and epistemic challenges involved in the study of the 'convention of the Arabs' are no less formidable than those occasioned by the scarcity of historical. The concept *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* intersects with concepts such as *siyāq* (context), *muqtaḍayāt al-aḥwāl* (contextual requirements), *al-maqām* (position), *aḥwāl al-tanzīl* (circumstances of revelation), *asbāb al-nuzul* (reasons of revelation), *munasabāt al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), etc. Some studies examine these terms individually on a theoretical level and look into their application, but none of these studies provide a theoretical or practical investigation of *maʿhūd al-ʿArab* in light of its broad meaning presented in this article.

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86   See: Helli, A. (2005). "Al-Ummī Wa Al-Ūmiyyūn: Muqārabah Fī Al-Mafhūm", Al-Multaqā, (Online: < Http://Almultaka.Org/Site.Php?Id=172&Idc=1&Idsc=1> Accessed Online 26th Aug. 2020).

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